

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 001202

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PA](#)

SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: LIBERAL PARTY LEADER DISCUSSES ELECTORAL PLANS

Classified By: James P. Merz. Reason 1.4 (b), (d).

1. (U) Summary. In a 9/19 meeting with the Ambassador, Sen. Armando Espinola, the Senate leader for the Liberal Party, Paraguay's leading opposition party, discussed plans for dealing with party dissidents in Congress and seeking an alliance with other political parties. He bemoaned the ruling Colorado Party's historical advantage in winning elections based on patronage and a wider claim to resources. He affirmed the Liberals remained opposed to amending the Constitution to allow the President to pursue a second term in office. The Ambassador conveyed concern that the government not adopt spending policies in a bid to build popular support in the run up to next year's elections. End Summary.

2. (U) In his meeting with the Ambassador, Sen. Espinola, the leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate, focused primarily on his Party's efforts to improve its prospects to compete with the Colorados in future elections, including next year's municipal elections and 2008 Presidential elections. He stressed the advantages that accrue to the Colorados after being in power for almost sixty years. First, they have access to resources, both public and private, with which no other party can compete. Second, they benefit from a party machinery that relies on party leaders spread throughout the country politicking on practically a full-time basis. Third, they use patronage liberally to shore up and secure support. Espinola complained that Liberals suffer "discrimination" in that even decisions over matters as seemingly apolitical as jobs for teachers often go to Colorados on the basis of their party affiliation.

3. (U) Espinola soberly admitted it was unlikely the Liberal Party alone could rally sufficient support to defeat the Colorados in any elections in the near future. As a result, he was keen for the Liberals to forge an alliance with other opposition parties to challenge the Colorados in the November 2006 municipal elections and the 2008 presidential election. He lamented that the Free Fatherland Party (PPQ) remained insistent on expanding its own political base and reluctant to building alliances with other opposition parties. However, he had not given up on PPQ. He regarded forming an alliance with the Union of Ethical Citizens (UNACE), the Party of imprisoned coup-plotter Lino Oviedo, as key.

4. (U) The Colorado Party is competing with the Liberals in actively courting UNACE. Practically all members of UNACE were formerly members of the Colorado Party before breaking off to create their own party in 2002. A number of UNACE reps have returned to the Colorado Party in recent months. Many Liberals share with UNACE a genuine affinity for Oviedo.

Thinking strategically, Espinola is afraid a decision by UNACE to align itself with the Colorados would give the Colorados the votes they need in the Senate to amend the constitution to allow for reelection of the president. Espinola recently voiced support for granting Oviedo political amnesty for his current conviction for involvement in a 1996 coup attempt; he also recently visited Oviedo in jail. Espinola said that he would not countenance any legal or political deal that would give Oviedo the right to run in upcoming elections out of fear over prospects he could well win. Separately, the Colorados have reportedly offered to have Oviedo placed under house arrest. Colorados supporting President Duarte would also be hard pressed to allow Oviedo to participate in elections. For his part, Oviedo remains insistent on being cleared of all charges presumably so he can take a run at political office.

5. (U) In the past, the Liberals have signaled a willingness to consider amending Paraguay's Constitution to enable standing President Duarte to run for reelection in exchange for provisions 1) for a second round between the two top vote getters in elections should the winner not gain a majority and 2) to allow Paraguayans living abroad to vote in elections. Espinola maintained the Liberals were presently opposed to this deal. He was skeptical about prospects for the opposition to win in the second round after attacking each other in the first round. While conventional wisdom has always held the Liberals have more voters living abroad, he was convinced Colorado voters abroad are more organized and likely to vote in elections. The Ambassador similarly suspected few Paraguayans living overseas would take the time and effort to register and vote in elections back home.

16. (C) Espinola remained in favor of adopting a formal decision to kick out of the Liberal Party 3 Senators and 6 Deputies who recently formed a coalition with the governing Colorado Party. This is a difficult decision for the party to take as these individuals garnered 9 percent of the vote in recent internal elections. However, Espinola considered the position of these Congressmen demoralizing on the party's rank and file. He believed kicking these Congressmen out of the party would facilitate party efforts to consolidate behind one strong candidate to oppose the Colorados. He did not believe Liberal Party President Blas Llano was interested in running as the Liberal Party candidate identifying Senators Carlos Mateo Barmelli and Tito Saguier or Deputy Efraim Alegre as possible candidates. He took on board the Ambassador's expression of concern about the present government taking on too much debt in adopting spending policies in the run-up to national elections. Nevertheless, he voiced his own desire that a Liberal backed government undertake a sweeping social investment program that would involve improving education and social services along with infrastructure and may incur taking on some considerable debt.

17. (U) Comment. Earlier in the year when the Liberals still controlled the Congress as part of a coalition of opposition parties, Espinola told Polcouns the Liberals were not interested in an electoral coalition, conveying confidence his party could challenge the Colorados on its own. Clearly his perspective has changed in the wake of the Colorados' successful bid to build a majority coalition in the Congress. While polls hardly demonstrate sweeping support for President Duarte, he has effectively consolidated his power and benefits from the non-emergence of an opposition figure. It remains too early to comment on prospects for building a coalition of opposition parties in preparation for elections over a year in the offing. End Comment.

KEANE